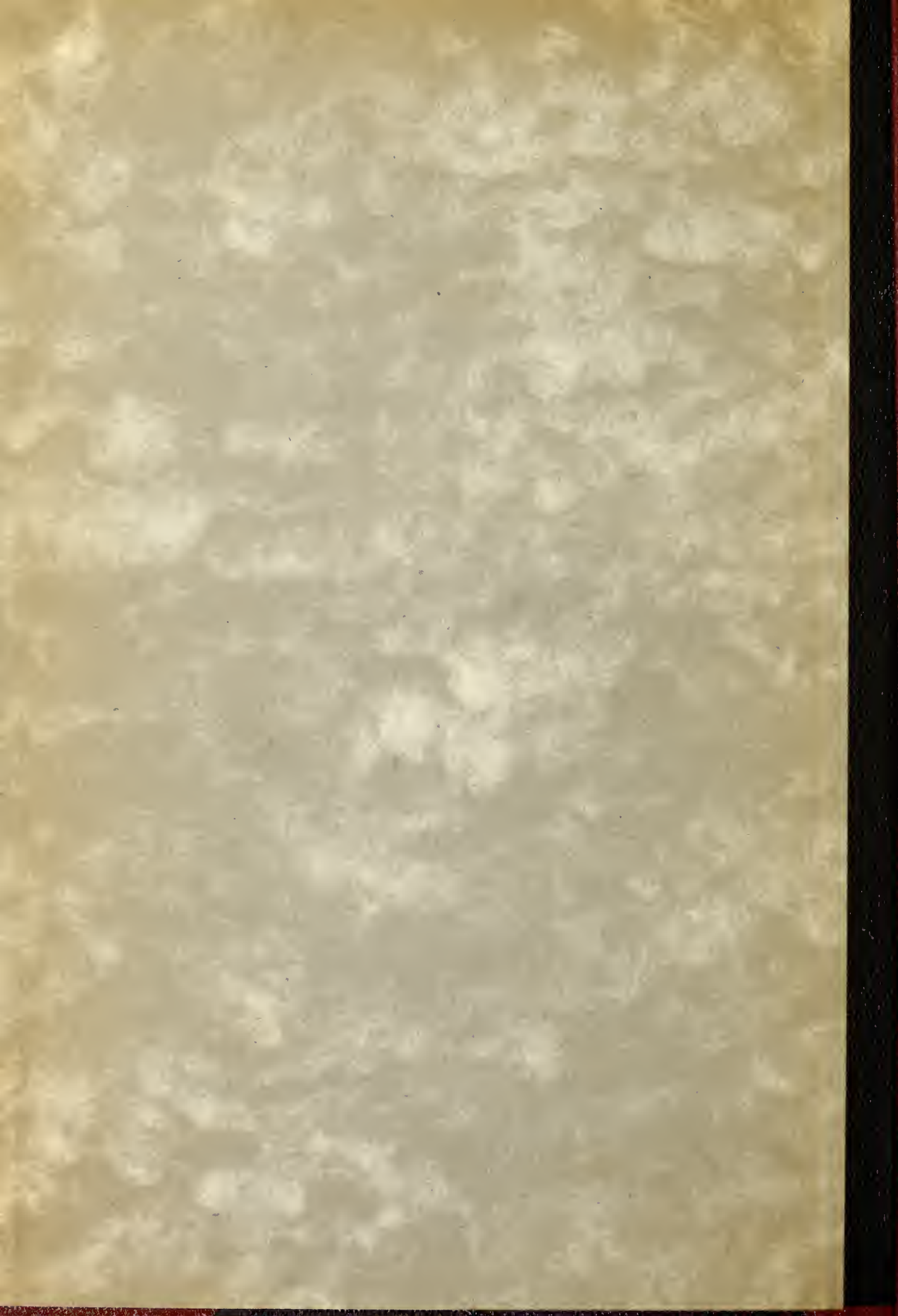


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Thesis

THE EARLY FRENCH THEATER

by

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THE EARLY FRENCH THEATER

Chapter I

Origins of the theater in general

The theater in Greece

The modern theater traces its origin to Greece. There Tragedy was born, an outgrowth of a special form of choral lyric called the dithyramb, a convivial song associated with the worship of Dionysus. The chorus producing a dithyramb was composed of satyrs, persons clad in goat costumes - whence the name tragedy meaning "goat song."

The first step taken toward dramatization of the song was by Thespis in 534 B.C., when he recited some verses distinct from the chorus of satyrs, and thus introduced the actor as such in addition to the leader of the chorus.

Then Aeschylus introduced a second actor distinct from the chorus and thus made the essential change from song to narrative drama, since it made possible dialogue and action. Sophocles added the third actor.

As tragedy developed, the chorus became less and less important until finally it became simply an onlooker, interrupting the action to comment or interpret.

Tragedy drew its subject matter from well-known myths; legends of past heroes, gods, and men were most appropriate material.

Comedy, like tragedy, also grew out of the worship of Dionysus. At the time of harvest festivals it was customary to indulge in wanton revelry. Songs were sung which presented the sensuous and licentious side of the worship of the god of wine. Later these songs, which were made up of unconnected episodes, were unified by a simple loosely-constructed plot. Comedy is as old as tragedy, but was slower in receiving public recognition in Athens. In technique it resembled tragedy, but in subject matter it differed greatly. Later it no longer concerned itself with the adventures of Dionysus, but satirized politics, religion, individuals, et cetera.

Throughout the earlier part of this period the theater was simply represented by a circular enclosure, or orchestra, in the center of which the chorus stood. The spectators gathered around the circle. But as tragedy grew in importance the actors were compelled to forsake the market place and resort to a larger enclosure. This enclosure was usually situated at the foot of a hill, the slope of which formed a natural amphitheater capable of holding a great number of people. Wooden benches were set up upon this slope, the orchestra being placed below, since there was no stage.

The theater in Rome

The Roman theater was hardly more than an imitation of the Greek, even at its best. Roman tragedy was an adulteration of Greek tragedy. Seneca alone is worthy of mention in connection with Roman tragedy. Plautus and Terence are the only outstanding names in Roman comedy. The rest succumbed to the popular demand for coarse farces and low types of humor, such as slap-stick comedy.

Perhaps in the matters of acting, stage settings, and magnificent theaters, the Romans did make progress beyond the Greeks. It was in Rome that the first dramatic performances by night were given. The Greeks did not have a stage or platform, but the Romans did. Some of their theaters were gorgeous, but their stages only gave coarse, vulgar, suggestive spectacles.

"A new protagonist comes into the story of the last days and eclipse of Roman drama. The record of the increasingly obscene mimes and pantomines is spotted with reports of attempted official censorship, but the censors had neither nobility of character nor conviction behind them. Then came the Christian Church, with conviction, moral courage, militant antagonism to sin and personal indulgence. As the darkness of decay falls over Rome, the drama is seen fleeing before the righteous wrath of the Church fathers. Actors become wandering vagabonds - though their tribe and their art never quite disappear. The Greek and Roman theaters fall into decay, are made over into fortresses,

are built full of huts, are torn down stone by stone for the sake of the rich building materials in them - until in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a few are cleared out, reclaimed, rededicated with Greek tragedy and comedy, or modern drama and opera. The play texts of the Greeks, and of Plautus and Terence, are forgotten, except as they afford study to monk-grammarians - until a nun of Saxony writes ecclesiastical plays after their pattern in the tenth century. Indeed, it is the Church that drives the drama into outer darkness, deservedly anathematized and despised, before Rome's story is wholly done, and it is the Church that will bring back drama as a preceptor of righteousness, an aid at the altar, when centuries have passed in penance."*

As a last reminder of the Roman stage we note that Arius, a famous Churchman of the fourth century, outlined a plan of a Christian theater to combat the lewd ones of the pagans; but nothing tangible resulted. The Roman theater which was then the amusement not only of the old capital and colonies, but also of Constantinople, persisted through the fifth and sixth centuries after the birth of Christ, and then died in the conflict with the increasing power of the Church. Some of the Fathers even went so far as to trace the fall of Rome to the influence of the theater. The last contemporary reference to the Roman stage is in a letter dated 533 A.D.

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*Cheney, Sheldon, "The Theatre: Comedy - Greece and Rome"

Chapter II

Origins of the theater in France

The Strolling Players

In France we may picture the wandering actors as producing some of their old plays at courts, private festivals, and even in city streets; but they are no longer true comedians - presenting complete plays intermingled with juggling, knife-throwing and tight rope walking.

We do not know just how far acting declined, or how closely drama came to extinction. But before it died entirely a new element sprang up, that of the recited poetic story. Without being really dramatic in itself it kept alive the "personal telling" of a dramatic incident. At its best it became an accepted art - minstrelsy - which in turn gave rise to a literature which is the most important of the early Middle Ages, the *Chansons de geste*.

The history of the strolling players is lost from about the sixth to the twelfth century, but the history of the singer or reciter is picked up even before the Church finally succeeds in suppressing the theater. In France, England, and Germany the activities of the singer-reciter can be traced, no less in the Annals of courts and feudal castles than in the prohibitions of a Church that still made no distinctions between the better and the worse sorts of entertainers. The minstrels were a substitute for the theater in the darker centuries, rather than a link between the ancient and medieval drama. They sang or chanted the things

that have been the material of drama in other times: of heroic deeds and legendary braveries, of men and women in love, and of funny happenings. A verse in *Cursor Mundi*, a fourteenth century poem, sums up their repertory:

"Men lykyn jestis for to here,
And romans rede in diuers manere ...
How kyng Charlis and Rowland fawght
With Sarzyns nold they be cawght,
Of Tristrem and of Ysoude the swete
How they with love first gan mete,
Of kyng John and of Isombras,
Of Ydoyne and of Amadas,
Stories of diuerce thynggis,
Many songgis of diuers ryme,
As english, frensh, and latyne."

As yet there were no ballroom stages, and we may picture the gleeman and his harpist arriving unannounced before the castle gates, singing and playing; invited in, entertaining lightly at dinner and afterward taking place at one end of the great hall while the lord and his ladies and guests would group themselves around him to hear a chanted tale of Charlemagne, or a metrical romance, such as the "Roman de la Rose."

Folk Plays

One other development during this time demanding notice is the growth of a body of more or less Christian folk-custom and folk-play bordering on the dramatic. The Church could not kill the festive spirit of the people whom it gradually won by conversion or conquest. Wisely the Church compromised and took to itself a certain number of the less ungodly and less ribald ceremonial customs. For the rest it waged an unsuccessful fight against the survival of



the old tribal dancing, the joyous processions and even the pagan superstitions as to what rites would make the new wine ferment or render the old field more fertile. For ten centuries from the establishment of Christianity as the recognized religion of civilized Europe to the Renaissance, there are records of the outbursts of the folk-drama instinct.

These are not enough related to afford basis for argument about a typical seventh or ninth century dramatic phenomenon, but the examples are by no means isolated. Rather is there evidence that in many places, and almost continuously, people were reverting to rituals and dances that the Church had forbidden as heathenish. Perhaps the most notable feature about these known festivals is that they group themselves naturally around the seasonal changes and division of the agricultural year. They seem to be perfectly parallel to the old Grecian fertility rites.

But let us turn now to the real beginning of Christian drama.

Chapter III

Liturgical Drama

In the ninth and tenth centuries the priests in the Catholic Church conceived the idea of inserting a song into the Mass. This song was sung by two or more singers or chanters with the strictly orthodox aim of "fortifying the unlearned people in their faith." They planned to picture an incident to their congregations by the vivid means of

living impersonators instead of letting one stationary singer tell about the incident in Latin words that not one out of a thousand faithful people understood. This custom spread; it was a wonderful aid to the understanding of the Mass. Soon the Mass was divided into read, sung and acted parts. At first the scene is very simple. A priest especially vested sits by "the sepulchre," while three others approach as if seeking something.

"Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, Christicolae?" chants the one.

"Jesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae," chant the three.

"Non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat.

Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit a mortuis."

The seekers return to the choir saying "Alleluia surrexit Dominus." The guardian of the sepulchre says, "Venite et videte locum," lifting a curtain showing the empty "tomb." Then follow hymns while the bells chime. Thus the congregation has seen pictured the incident of the Three Maries and the Angel at the tomb of Jesus. These incidents inserted into the Mass are called "liturgical drama," and mark the real birth of the theater in the church. They were simply an effective means of teaching the Bible, and claimed no literary value. At first they were entirely in Latin prose. Then the language changed to a mixture of Latin and vernacular, and finally to French.

The oldest of these liturgical dramas is that of "The Wise and Foolish Virgins," which was contemporaneous with "La Chanson de Roland." Another famous liturgical drama

was "The Prophets."

Just when and where the grouped liturgical dramatic inserts may be said to have become independent religious plays no one may venture to say. But before the first "Passion" or other Mystery play was acted, there had been attempts at literary playwriting by church people. It is to a nun of the Gandersheim Abbey in Saxony to whom we owe the earliest plays written in the West. This nun, Hros-vitha by name, was the author of six Latin dramas, imitated from Terence, on religious themes. These dramas were never performed in public; they are dramatic in character, but they stand as an absolutely isolated fact in the history of the theater of the Middle Ages before the eleventh century. Since these plays were founded on a pagan model, Terence, they exercised no influence upon the character of religious drama.

The plays would find in the cathedral an appropriate and beautiful setting. There were simple arrangements for the manger, the throne of Herod, the road to Egypt, et cetera, in the raised altar area of the church. In a thirteenth century Orleans manuscript, there are six Mysteries designed to be given in a simple way. All are written very briefly in verse and prose, and with the obvious intention that hymns and anthems be sung at appropriate intervals. The priests are the actors, and the choir boys join in when needed.

The Feast of Fools

The Feast of Fools and The Feast of Asses were two desecrations of the cathedral-theater. These functions usually took place at Christmas, but sometimes on January first or twelfth. They were a Christian substitution of the Bacchanalia, and so were in the same spirit of licentiousness. This custom flourished in France in the eleventh century. Thenceforward it was the custom to elect, at the date of the ancient Saturnalia, between the sixth and eighteenth of December, a Bishop or Archbishop of Fools. The period of these rejoicings (which lasted for three days) began before Christmas, and was prolonged during the Feast of the Innocents, of the Circumcision and of the Epiphany. The newly elected prelate, clad in pontifical vestments, and followed by a long train of ecclesiastics dressed up as mimes or as buffoons, entered the church where he celebrated Mass in the presence of the faithful, many of whom were disguised as monsters. During the religious ceremony ribald songs were sung to church tunes, some played at dice, and others ate and drank at the altar. Rubber was burned instead of incense, and the "Allelulia" was brayed. A parody of the flight into Egypt is known to have been played, with a real ass brought to the altar rail. Each part of the Mass then ended with a bray and the congregation responded with a "hee-haw." The Mass over, the Bishop of Fools, in a carriage, paraded the streets of the town in procession.

"Carols"

It was also during the Christmas festival that the rejoicings called "Carols" took place in the churches. These consisted of songs and dances, or rather galops, which began in the choir and continued down the nave, ending as a rule in the graveyard. These revels were of such an unseemly character that the priests had to warn the people not to unite in dances with singing and leaping after the manner of the pagans.

It is only too obvious how this framework would be seized upon by the more rowdy elements in the Church, and among the townsmen for that matter, for the development of drunken and licentious scenes in the cathedral, of bitter parodies of religious offices, of staging mock Mysteries, of corrupting such traditional ceremonials as the choir boys' processions. Indeed, there seems no possible excess to which the Fools did not stoop during the next four centuries. The Church fathers kept up a running fire of prohibitions, indictments and condemnations. In the thirteenth century the Bishop of Lincoln twice prohibited the "festum stultorum as an execrable custom by which the Feast of the Circumcision is defiled, and as a vain and filthy recreation hateful to God and dear to the devil."

In the year 1445, the Theological Faculty at the University of Paris issued a letter to the bishops which summed up the abuses:

" 'Priests and clerks may be seen wearing masks and monstrous visages at the hours of office. They dance

in the choir dressed as women, panders, or minstrels. They sing wanton songs. They eat black puddings at the horn of the altar while the celebrant is saying Mass. They play at dice there. They cense with stinking smoke from the soles of old shoes. They run and leap through the church, without a blush at their own shame. Finally they drive about the town and its theaters in snabby traps and carts; and rouse the laughter of their fellows and the bystanders in infamous performances, with indecent gestures and verses scurrilous and unchaste.'

As the zealous Fathers once spent three centuries scourging the actors from the stages in Rome, they now spend three centuries ridding their own House of a semi-theatric desecration. They are betrayed often within their own walls, they make a prohibition effective here only to see the abuses flower more licentiously there; they disagree among themselves. A few, wiser than their fellows, try to divert the comedy and burlesque of the Feast of Fools into the channel of the now secularized Mystery and Miracle Plays.

The serious religious drama that grew out of the solemn trope of the Mass, and out of the Mystery at the altar and on the cathedral porch, has now absorbed more popular elements, by way of realistic incident and farcical episode and spectacle. It already is being pushed away even from the church porch, by a clergy grown suspicious of its popularity and afraid of its vividness and its humor. The theater is going out of the Church again, perhaps for all

time. We may, if we listen carefully, hear the venerable archbishop praying, "Dear God, please make doubly sure that the Roy des Fous and the Ass depart with the rest!" And indeed, along with the Saints and the Devils and the Biblical personages, the Ass and the Fools will turn up again, when the priests have given over the stages to the guilds and fraternities."*

Chapter IV

The Miracle Play

Along with Liturgical Drama another dramatic type of a religious character developed from the twelfth century. This was the Miracle Play, which concerned itself with the miraculous lives of the saints. At the beginning, the miracle play assumed the form of a chanted dialogue exalting the glory and virtues of the saint. This type of play was almost always performed on the gallery or porch outside the church. The invasion of the profane elements into the drama being so common, it was felt necessary to bring the simple stage outside the church, with opportunity still for the church music and with the doors handy for exits and entrances. The clergy are still the actors.

"Drame d'Adam"

The most important work of the twelfth century is the Drame d'Adam, which is the link between the Liturgical

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*Cheney, Sheldon, "The Theatre: In the Church" Page 151.

Drama and the Mystery Play. This work is regarded as the oldest drama in the French language. It is supposed by some authorities to have been written in England where Franch was then in use alongside the scholarly Latin and vulgar English, but as yet this has not been proven to be accurate. Where the early tropes were hardly more than paraphrases of the Biblical text, we find in the "Adam" an elaborate story, with sharply characterized protagonists, written with considerable theatric ingenuity if without great literary merit. It is designed to be played before a church, as in one of the stage directions it notes that God goes in and out of the Church; and the absence of any large number of scenes makes it an ideal piece for presentation on the church porch.

The play is divided into three parts, accompanied by choruses and closing with an epilogue. The first act covers the Fall of Man; the second act the murder of Abel; the third act the appearance of the Propnets who came as the forerunner of the Saviour. At intervals the chorus sings Latin verses, the epilogue consists of a sermon on the need for penitence. This Mystery, which unites the three modes of tragedy, pantomine and opera, was performed, but where and when is not definitely known. The following is an extract from this play; the scene in which Satan seduces Eve by flattery:

"Tu es faiblesse et tendre chose,
Et es plus fraiche que la rose.
Tu es plus blanche que cristal,

Ou que neige sur glace en val.
Dieu vous a très mal accouplés.
Tu es trop tendre, Adam trop dur
Mais toutefois tu es plus sage,
Tu as grand sens en ton courage...
Je vous préviens d'un grand engin
Qui vous est fait en ce jardin.
Le fruit que Dieu vous a donné,
N'a en soi guère de bonté.
Celui qu'il a tant défendu,
Il a en soi très grand' vertu.
En lui est la grâce de vie,
De pouvoir et de seigneurie,
De tout savoir, le bien, le mal."

"Jeu de Saint Nicolas"

It was toward the middle of the thirteenth century that religious drama became definitely secularized. It abandoned the sanctuary and the church porches for a theater set up for the special occasion, either in the market place or in some castle-hall. The first drama to be presented under such conditions was the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas," and since the "Drame d'Adam" was unknown, the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas" passed for the oldest Mystery play written in French. It was the work of a poor poet named Jean Bodel. He produced a real drama from the Latin legend which celebrated the miracles of Saint Nicolas. This drama comes under the category of Miracle plays as a narrative of the superhuman acts attributed to a saint, and occupies an important position in the history of the drama. The author transferred it to the time of the first crusade of St. Louis in 1248, and connected it indirectly with contemporary events, thus combining modern with ecclesiastical history. The following quotation contains some very beautiful verses:

Les chrétiens se battent avec l'armée musulmane.

Un ange apparaissait au dessus des bataillons et leur parlait ainsi:

"Seigneurs, soyez tout assurés;
N'ayez ni doute ni terreur.
Je suis messenger du Seigneur.
Il vous mettra hors de douleur.
Ayez vos coeurs fiers et croyants
En Dieu, Mais pour ces mécréants
Qui sur vous viennent se ruant,
Que vos coeurs soient en assurance.
Exposez hardiment vos corps
Pour Dieu, car c'est ici la mort
Dont tout le peuple doit mourir,
Qui aime Dieu, et en lui croit.

Ils combattent, ils meurent; et l'ange entonne sur
leurs cadavres ce chant de gloire et de pitié:

Ah! chevaliers qui ci-gisez,
Comme vous êtes bienheureux!
Comme à présent vous méprisez
Le monde où tant avez duré!
Pour le mal que vous avez eu,
Je le crois, très bien vous savez
Quel bien c'est que le paradis
Où Dieu place tous ses amis.
A vous bien prendre garde doit
Tout le monde, et ainsi mourir;
Car Dieu très doucement reçoit
Ceux qui à lui veulent venir.
Qui de bon coeur le servira,
Déjà sa peine il ne perdra,
Mais sera aux cieux couronné
Des couronnes que vous avez."

"Le Miracle de Theophile"

The "Miracle de Théophile" by Rutebeuf is the only other miracle of that century which has come down to us. Many other plays were written no doubt, but we have no trace of them. The story of Théophile was very well known in the Middle Ages since all the arts had pop-

ularized it. Hrosvitha had treated the theme in the tenth century. Théophile was an ambitious priest of the sixth century, who was supposed to have sold his soul to the devil. Later he was converted and was saved by the intercession of the Virgin Mary. Rutebeuf's style is energetic, and so the best parts of the play are those in which bitterness or violence is portrayed. The quotation below shows Théophile alone, friendless, without resources, facing ruin.

"A présent faut mourir de faim;
Vendre ma robe pour du pain...
Car Dieu me fait l'oreille sourde,
Il n'a cure de ma falourde.
Soit, Je lui referai la moue.
Honni soit qui de lui se loue!
Pour l'argent, n'est rien qu'on ne fasse.
Tant pis pour Dieu et sa menace.
Irai-je me noyer ou pendre?
Mais à quoi bon à Dieu s'en prendre.
On ne peut à lui parvenir.
Ah! si on pouvait le tenir...
Mais il s'est en si haut lieu mis
Pour esquiver ses ennemis.
On n'y peut tirer ni lancer.
Ah! si je pouvais l'y craint rien.
Moi, chétif, je suis enlacé
De disette et de pauvreté."

"For some years previously trade guilds had begun to organize themselves into religious fraternities for the performance of Mystery plays. These associations had not only the support of the magistrates, but also that of the clergy, who saw in them an instrument for the propagation of religious teachings. Permanent theaters were still unknown, so these fraternities resorted, for their performances, to scaffolding in two superposed stages. The upper of

these represented Paradise, with God and the Virgin seated on a throne surrounded by the Heavenly Court. The lower platform was reserved for scenes of a secular character, and was divided by partitions or curtains into as many boxes as there were different localities in the play. The upper platform communicated with the lower by a circular stair at either side of the stage. By this path the celestial inhabitants descended to the lower platform when the exigences of the piece required it. The theater was erected in a graveyard, or more rarely in the market place. Such was the arrangement of the earliest temporary theaters during the thirteenth century, and indeed down to the epoch at which the first poems on the Old Testament, The Passion, and the Acts of the Apostles appeared.

while the Mystery Play was thus brought out of the Church, and its secular character accentuated, Comedy tried to make its way into the Drama, and this is the most important event in the history of the theater in the thirteenth century. *

Chapter V

Comedy

"Le Jeu d'Adam ou de la Feuillée"

Adam de la Halle has the honor of writing the first specimen of comedy properly so-called. He was a native of

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*Hastings, Charles, "Le Théâtre Français et Anglais" Page 104.

Arras as was Jean Bodel. When he wrote "Le Jeu d'Adam, in 1262, he was about thirty years old. The play is a brilliant satire in which he relates his own adventures, those of his family and those of his friends. The story is bizarre; in no other period has comedy ever produced a play so filled with characters. The whole town of Arras is included in a somewhat jumbled fashion. The play is very dramatic.

Dans les vers suivants Adam de la Halle raconte sa jeunesse naïve, et le mariage d'amour qu'il se repent.

"Amour ne surprit en ce point
Où deux fois se blesse un amant
S'il se veut contre lui défendre.
Je fus pris au premier bouillon,
Tout droit en la verte saison,
Et dans l'âpreté de jeunesse,
Où la chose a plus grand'saveur...
C'était l'été, beau et serein,
Doux et vert, et clair, et joli,
Délectable en chants d'oisillons.
En haut bois, auprès d'une eau vive
Courant sur lit de fins cailloux,
Devant moi j'eus la vision
De celle...Aujourd'hui, c'est ma femme."

Despite the incoherence of the play, it has considerable importance both from the historical and literary point of view. It is filled with allusions to contemporary affairs, and contains violent attacks on important personages, political bodies, the Church, and even the Pope himself. It very closely resembles the comedy of Aristophanes from whom Adam de la Halle seems to have borrowed his bitterness, crudity of language, and even his coarseness.

We have no idea under what conditions "Le Jeu d'Adam" was acted, but there is sufficient reason to believe

it was represented in a "Puy;" that is, in one of the semi-religious, semi-secular academies, numerous enough in the Middle Ages.

The "Puys" were organized by the bourgeois for political purposes, but instead of being merely political associations for the control of commerce and industry, these societies soon developed into organizations for the cultivation of poetry and music.

"Le Jeu de Robin et Marion"

"Le Jeu de Robin et Marion," also by Adam de la Halle, has been called the first French comic opera. Adam de la Halle wrote the music to the opera as well as the words.

Robin and Marion (these were the traditional names for all country lovers during the middle ages) were two native peasants deeply in love. The villain, a chevalier, tries to make love to Marion, but she spurns his attentions and remains faithful to Robin. The story is told with much grace and simplicity.

"Or dites douce bergerette
Aimeriez vous un chevalier?
Beau sire, tirez vous arrière
Je ne sais que sont chevaliers
Dessus tous les hommes du monde
Jamais n'aimerai que Robin."

This work is also valuable for the glimpses it gives us of country life in the middle ages. We see Robin and Marion eating a rustic meal consisting of bread, cheese and apples. Then they dance and amuse themselves playing childish games.

Chapter VI

"Les Miracles de Notre-Dame"

Of the compositions of the fourteenth century that have come down to us, forty-three of them were of the same style, that of "Les Miracles de Notre-Dame." Then we have one secular Mystery, five Provençal Mysteries, and one Mystery of the Passion.

These "Miracles de Notre-Dame" were all of the same character; namely, the representation of some miraculous event produced by the intervention of the Virgin Mary.

The authors of the "Miracles" drew their subject matter from various sources. The lives and legends of various saints were popular subjects, the chansons de gestes, latin collections of miraculous adventures, all these and many others were used. Besides being very crude as to the language, they also contained attacks on the church and the Pope, for which reasons it became impossible for them to be performed within the church or on the church porch. Hence, they were always performed in the "Puys." Some of the "Miracles" give valuable information concerning the manners of the nobility, the bourgeoisie, the people and the ecclesiastical world of the fourteenth century.

Although the plays are filled with historical personages, they have no historical value because the authors have disregarded truth. They have just attributed to the famous men of the various periods qualities which seemed to them appropriate to that time. The scenes are laid in a

hundred different countries, anywhere from Scotland to the Orient, and the time varies from the birth of Christ up to the period when the play was written.

The Pope, the cardinals, and the kings are presented under an unfavorable aspect. The lower classes are described as being cowardly, but gentle and sympathetic. Women, especially the married ones, are treated respectfully, and often play the part of sufferers, of victims of their husbands, et cetera. We also find many of the situations dear to the modern melodramatist in the repertory of the fourteenth century theater.

The titles of a few of the "Miracles" tell us enough of the subject:

"Ci commence un miracle de Notre-Dame, comment un enfant ressuscita entre les bras de sa mère, que l'on voulait brûler, pour ce qu'elle l'avait noyé."

"Ci commence un miracle de Notre-Dame d'Amis et d'Amille, lequel Amille tua ses deux enfants pour guérir Amis, son compagnon, qui était lépreux; et depuis les ressuscita Notre-Dame."

"Ci commence un miracle de Notre-Dame, comment le roi Clovis se fit Chrétienner à la requête de Clotilde sa femme, pour une bataille qu'il avait contre Allemands et Saxons; dont il eut la victoire, et en le chrétiennant envoya Dieu la Sainte Ampoule."

The versification is the same in almost all the plays; the eight syllable line, with a little rhyme of four

syllables at the end of the couplet, rhyming with the first part of the following couplet.

Among the "Miracles de Notre-Dame," the most celebrated is that of "Robert le Diable," not because this play is any better than the rest, but because its text was revised by Edouard Fournier and presented at La Gaité on March 2, 1879. Its success was not outstanding. The public was not bored, but it was amused, "et le ridicule tue en France."

The following extract shows the fourteenth century French in which the "Miracles de Notre-Dame" were written:

"Guibour, dire vous vueil m'entente
Je m'en vois sanz plus faire attente
Aux champs visiter mes gaignages
Afin que d'ouvriers commes sages
Soie pourverez sans faillir."

In addition, we have from the fourteenth century a manuscript "Histoire de Grisélidis" which was only a little drama borrowing most of its characters from the legendary moralities. Lastly, five Provençal Mysteries, the most famous being that of "Saint Agnes," and one Passion Play, completing the category of the fourteenth century compositions. These were probable presented in a "Puy."

Of the "mis-en-scene" in these "Puis" we only know that it was very complicated; there was no division into acts, nor shifting of scenery, and the different changes of scenes were indicated by means of written notices.

The original and dramatic style created by Adam de la Halle in "Robin et Marion" and in "Le Jeu de la Feuillée"

did not survive him. Neither had that style which was to become so brilliant in the fifteenth century under the names of "moralities," "farces," and "sotties" been developed yet.

We find only two plays in dialogue among the extensive work of Eustache Deschamps, but the first, "Le Dit des Quatre Offices de l'Hôtel du Roi," is little more than a morality, the principal characters of which are Paneterie, Échansonnerie, Cuisine and Saucerie. This kind of play was also called an *entremot*, because it made a sort of interlude in the royal feasts. The other production of Eustache Deschamps, "Maître Trubert et Antroignart" is just a dialogue intermixed with a short story. These plays were not acted; they are our only trace of fourteenth century comedy.

It appears that there was a gap between thirteenth century comedy and that of the fifteenth century, for it does not seem very likely that fourteenth century comedy died leaving just a bare trace. But it may be that the works in this vein have all perished; no one can say just what happened to fourteenth century comedy.

Throughout the fourteenth century the French and also the Latin Mystery plays were performed in the churches and graveyards, or in the market places, with the same kind of ceremony as in the thirteenth century. M. Petit de Julléville has located the performance of several Mysteries- those of the Nativity, the Passion, the Resurrection, and that of Saint Catherine- in the provinces, as well as in Paris between the dates 1333 and 1402.

Mimed Mysteries were invented again at the beginning of the fourteenth century. These plays were sort of pantomines, having a dramatic scheme, designed to celebrate national victories or the entry of a sovereign into a city. The acting took place on scaffoldings set up along the path of the "cortège." The first Passion Play, that is, the whole history of Christ from the Nativity to the Crucifixion, was thus represented by a dumb show in 1313. A Mystery of Pentecost was played under the same conditions in Paris in 1389. So while the production of Religious Dramas was scanty in the fourteenth century, it was not quite as rare as the Comedy of that century.

For a long time the general opinion was that the French theater originated with the Confrères de la Passion, authorized by the letters-patent of Charles VI in 1402. Of course this opinion has been disproved as has been shown by the discussion on the theater of the four preceding centuries. But it is only fair to add that it was only from the fifteenth century on that the theater had its full power and development. At that time only did the appreciation of the theater become universal; and the play became a part of the national customs, had a great deal of influence, and enjoyed an unequalled popularity. It is not that the exuberant style of the works of this century surpassed in literary value the shorter and more sober works of Jean Bodel, Adam de la Halle, or the anonymous author of "Les Miracles de Notre-Dame;" in fact, we believe quite the contrary to be true.

Chapter VII

Mystery Plays

Mystery plays properly so-called (that is, Spoken Mysteries) date from the fifteenth century. The word "Mystery" in the dramatic sense, is not very old. It did not appear before the fifteenth century and designates first the mimes and pictured representations of a kind of living tableaux by which were celebrated the royal entries. Petit de Julleville says, "Le 1^{er} décembre 1420, lorsque Charles VI et son gendre Henry V, après le funeste traité de Troyes, revinrent dans la capitale fut fait en la rue de la Calendre, devant le Palais, un moult piteux "mystère" de la passion de Notre-Seigneur au vif, selon qu'elle est figurée autour du chœur de Notre-Dame de Paris.... et n'était homme qui vit le Mystère à qui le coeur n'apitoyât."*

The Mysteries can be divided into three cycles, according to the subject matter and the source; the cycle of the Old Testament, that of the New Testament, and the Apostles, and the cycle of the lives of the saints.

The Mysteries having the Old Testament as a source were compiled in the second half of the fifteenth century into one play of 50,000 verses, and was still performed in its entirety in Paris in 1542 by the confreres de la Passion in the hotel de Flandres. The admission was two cents; a loge cost thirty dollars for the entire season, including

*Petit de Julleville, "Le Théâtre en France: Les Mystères"

perhaps twenty performances.

Among the Mysteries drawn from the New Testament the most celebrated and the best is the "Passion" by Arnoul Greban. This was written in 1450 and has 34,574 verses embracing the whole story of Christ. One part of this work including the Passion proper was written at the end of the century by Jean Michel, a doctor of Angers. No Mystery was performed as often as the Passion. It was the most popular of all the plays and was represented many times from the beginning of the fourteenth century up to the time of the Renaissance.

The cycle of the Saints includes more than forty Mysteries dealing with the life and death of some famous saint. The oldest of these saints are contemporary with apostolic times, and the most recent lived in the thirteenth century. These last are particularly interesting because of the details they give us of the customs and manners of certain towns and provinces. Among the most famous Mysteries in the Saints Cycle were those of St. Crispin, St. George, and Ste. Catharine.

A few of the Mysteries do not come under this division of the three cycles; for example, the Mystery of the "Siège d'Orléans" which tells of Joan of Arc's freeing Orleans; the mystery of "Destruction de Troie," unique because it is the only one borrowed from pagan antiquity.

The representation of the Mystery generally began with a prologue and sometimes after the prologue the fool

came on to deliver his buffoonery. The object of the prologue was usually to announce the subject and to summarize its different phases, but sometimes it included an invitation to the actors to begin the play. The mystery was divided into "days," two of which, however, were often acted in the same day.

The performances usually ended with an epilogue, which reviewed the events of the day, and asked the audience to come again. Sometimes there were short sermons delivered by priests, in addition to the epilogue.

"Most interesting are the glimpses of contemporary life afforded us by the Mysteries. There are numerous descriptions of domestic life, and curious details as to the habits of the unclassed, more especially the beggars and thieves. As in the Miracle Plays of the fourteenth century, the poor people nearly always played the better part, while the clergy and nobility came off rather badly. The fashionable world, the coquettes and fops, were ridiculed. The Mysteries abound in anachronisms, the inevitable consequence of the passion that their authors had for parading their literary science at any cost. Since the aim of the piece was to instruct by amusing, it was imperative to introduce the element of buffoonery, and this role was played by the secondary characters -- messengers, executioners, valets, blind men, beggars, and more especially the fools. In order to rest the minds of the spectators, a Farce was, in the fifteenth century, not infrequently interpolated between

two days of the mystery. The realism of certain scenes was appalling, recalling by its brutality the horrid spectacles of the ancient Roman theatre. The executioners permitted themselves all kinds of coarse and sinister jests in the presence of their victims, and endeavoured to give complete reality to the torture. In many Mysteries the amusing parts and the serious parts occur in succession; but unlike the English Miracle Plays, which are generally characterized by frank gaiety, the French plays have somewhat of a ferocious and cruel aspect."*

From the beginning of the fifteenth century Spoken Mysteries were represented in all the towns in France even though the vogue was still for Mimed Mysteries. In the provinces they assumed an unheard of splendor, the preparations for some mysteries beginning a whole year beforehand. All classes of people contributed to the success of these religious dramas which sometimes included several hundred people. The religious fraternities, the lay associations, professional actors and the clergy appeared on the stage.

"Le mystère a péché par beaucoup de défauts; mais surtout par la diffusion du style et par l'abus du mélange des tons les plus disparates. Chaque mystère est un chaos, où tous les éléments sont mêlés confusément; Dieu, les anges, les saints, les démons, les rois, la pop-

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*Hastings, Charles, "Le Théâtre Français et Anglais" Page 128

ulace, les voleurs, les 'rous', les mendiants s'y heurtent, s'y coudoient dans une action multiple et touffue, ou plutôt inextricable. Le poète avait voulu calquer la vie humaine, où les bouffons rencontrent sans cesse les héros; où le rire éclate auprès des larmes qui coulent. Mais le mélange indiscret du grotesque et du pathétique, ailleurs mieux supporté, chez les Anglais, chez les Espagnols, fut toujours dangereux en France; et quand l'impression du drame est indécise, il est à craindre que, chez nous, le ridicule ne l'enporte. Par là finirent les mystères; on s'était d'abord amusé du burlesque, dont ils sont remplis; on finit par s'amuser aussi du pathétique; et le genre s'effondra au bruit des éclats de rire. Il fallut que le parlement de Paris interdît, en 1548, de donner les choses saintes en spectacle; car c'eût été désormais les livrer à la dérision. Triste fin d'un genre dramatique dont la renommée pendant un siècle et demi avait été sans égale."*

The Mysteries have a historical interest because of their great popularity; the ideas and the sentiments of the period are pictured faithfully. As for the rest, the literary value is not outstanding. The characters are not true to life nor is the verse beautiful.

An exception is the "Passion" of Jean Michel. The passage where Mary entreates with Jesus, on the eve of

*Petit de Julleville, "Le Théâtre en France: Les Mystères"

the crucifixion, to grant her at least one of these four favors: that he escape death; that if He must die He do so without suffering; that if He must suffer, she be allowed to die before seeing Him die; that if she must witness His death He render her as unfeeling as a stone. Jesus gently refuses these four demands and answers the last one thus:

"Ce ne serait pas votre honneur,
Que vous, mère très douce et tendre,
Vissiez votre vrai fils étendre
En la croix, et le mettre à mort,
Sans en avoir aucun remords
De douleur et compassion.
Et aussi le bon Siméon,
De vos douleurs prophétisa,
Quand entre ses bras m'embrass.,
Que le glaive de ma douleur
Vous percerait l'âme et le coeur
Par compassion très amère.
Pour ce, contentez-vous, ma mère,
Et confortez en Dieu votre âme.
Soyez forte, car jamais femme
Ne souffrit tant que vous ferez;
Mais en souffrant, mériterez
Cette auréole du martyre....
--Au moins, veuillez, de votre grâce,
Mourir de mort brève et légère.
--Je mourrai de mort très amère.
--Non pas fort vilaine et honteuse.
--Mais très fort ignominieuse.
--Donc, soit bien loin s'il est permis.
--Au milieu de tous mes amis.
--Que ce soit de nuit, je vous prie.
--Non; en pleine heure de midi.
--Mourez donc comme les barons.
--Je mourrai entre deux larrons.
--Que ce soit sous terre, et sans voix.
--Ce sera haut pendu en croix.
--Vous serez au moins revêtu.
--Attendez l'âge de vieillesse.
--En la force de ma jeunesse.
--C'est très ardente charité.
Mais pour l'honneur d'humanité,
Ne soit votre sang répandu.
--Je serai tiré et tendu
Tant qu'on nombrera tous mes os...

--A mes maternelles demandes
Ne donnez que reponses dures.
--Il faut remplir les Écritures."*

It is very rarely that we find such noble thoughts expressed in such beautiful words in the Mysteries.

Usually the authors troubles themselves very little about the future readers of their plays; they worried only about the representation. It was a very expensive and tedious task to perform a Mystery play. But, in the Middle Ages, the peoples' love for the theater was so great that we see all classes of society take part in the representations of the Mysteries; the clergy, the nobility, the common people, et cetera-- all were equally interested in them. By the fifteenth century the clergy had lost their hold in the Mysteries, but they were interested in encouraging the diffusion of religious teaching, and so on this account often took the initiative in the performances, contributing to them actors, costumes, sites, and very often great sums of money. Many nobles also favored these performances; some even took part in them. But none of these had the zealous ardor of the bourgeois, the artisan, the merchant. It was the institution of "le peuple."

Sometimes individuals undertook the burden of the expenses. Sometimes a particular guild would

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*Petit de Julleville, "Le Theatre en France: Les Mystères"

undertake the representation in honor of their patron saint. Very often municipalities paid the expenses. But the most common custom was to give a temporary society of volunteers the charge of the whole performance, and divide the profits, if there were any. These societies would dissolve after the performance was over. Previous to any performance, superintendents were chosen who were liable for certain parts of the representation. These superintendents were shareholders like the actors, and had to give guarantees beforehand. The profits were then divided between the superintendents, the actors, and the administrators.

The theater was usually installed in the market place, in the court of a monastery, or in the adjoining graveyard, but in certain towns the old arenas were used. The stage was about one hundred feet wide by one hundred feet deep. The scenery consisted of compartments intended to figure in perspective on various planes at different heights, as heaven, hell, the world, et cetera. Since only the action travelled, the actor moved to the various labelled compartments each time the scene changed, and then returned to sit down on the steps of the theater. When the "mise en scene" was too complicated, its different parts were enumerated in the prologue.

The spectators were frequently accommodated in big amphitheatres capable of seating 80,000 people.

Sometimes the actors and audience were protected from the rain by big sheets spread above. The admission was generally free for the municipality undertook the expense; but on some occasions the admission varied from ten "sous" to two francs, according to the rank and condition of the people. The nobles and other dignitaries occupied the higher-priced seats; the common people stood or sat on the ground - the men on the right and the women on the left, as in the churches. The performances were announced by the town "crier" in the public places of the town.

"The art of the mechanician was fairly developed in the construction of the theater for these Mystery plays, although there were no changes of scene. As early as the fourteenth century it was possible, with the aid of the improved machinery, not merely to make the actors disappear within the clouds, but also to navigate boats and run carriages around. Smoke was used to imitate night and darkness. Thunder claps were produced by means of stones rolled about in a tub, and by the fifteenth century the progress of pyrotechnics admitted of a lightning display. The decoration of the principal Mysteries was the work of the best painters, who varied their productions "ad infinitum." The scenes were often as gigantic as those of the modern opera. Since there were no studios in those days, the painters

worked at their scenes upon the actual scaffolding. Before executing them, they proposed their scheme to the municipality by whom they were accepted, refused, or modified."*

All these details refer to the representations of the Mysteries in the province, for in Paris the Spoken Mystery was acted in a permanent theater. Towards 1398 a society consisting of artisans and citizens had united in Paris to give religious plays which were drawn from the New Testament. After being expelled from the village of Saint-Maur, where they had had a theater, they obtained letters-patent from Charles VI in 1402, giving them full privileges of a corporation. Thus they became organized as the "Confrérie de la Passion", and hired the Hôpital de la Trinité in Paris. Here they devoted themselves entirely to the production of Passion plays.

We have many chronicles abounding with curious testimonies concerning the enthusiasm these representations excited and the earnestness with which they were acted. For example:

"En 1457, au mois de juillet, fut joué à Metz le jeu de la Passion. Le rôle du Messie était tenu par le curé de Saint-Victor de Metz, lequel cuida mourir étant en l'arbre de la croix; car le coeur lui

*Bapst, "Essai Sur l'Histoire du Theater"

faillit, et convint mettre en sa place un autre prêtre, qui s'était d'abord contenté modestement de jouer le rôle d'un des bourreaux du dit jeu. Le lendemain le dit curé fut revenu à lui et parfit la Resurrection, et fit très hautement son personnage. Mais un autre prêtre, lequel portait la personnage de Judas, pour ce qu'il pendit trop longuement, fut pareillement transi et quasi mort; il fut bien hâtivement dependu et emporté pour le frotter de vinaigre."*

Chapter VIII

Moralities - Farces - Sotties

The drama with which we have concerned ourselves thus far has been of a religious nature. But during this last century when the Middle Ages, properly so-called, was in decadence, and fore-runners of the Renaissance were appearing, we see comedy, which was so entirely neglected during the fourteenth century, make a new start alongside of the Mystery Play. The development of this type, that was just barely sketched out in the thirteenth century, corresponded to a spiritual need. As M. Petit de Julleville has justly remarked, "Humanity was no longer contented with tradition. From henceforward it would use the forces of its intelligence to observe, to analyse, and to conclude." For the rest, this

*Petit de Julleville, "Le Théâtre en France: Les Mysteres"

revolution in the intellectual order originated with the literary class. The numerous clerks in the service of the Government and of the Parliament formed corporations, the most powerful of which was the 'Clercs de la Basoche,' which included all the lawyers throughout the extent of French territory. This corporation had its own privileges, a special jurisdiction, and a king who wore a cap similar to that worn by the King of France. Of all these advantages, the one most valued was that of giving theatrical representations in the great Palais de Justice.

Encouraged by the success of the "Confé-
rerie de la Passion," the "Clercs de la Basoche" began to compose plays which they themselves interpreted. But instead of drawing inspiration from the Bible, they became the creators of a new type, the Morality, or the allegorical play.

The earliest Moralities date from the second half of the fifteenth century. They are dramatic plays written with the didactic purpose of teaching a moral lesson. They portrayed the evil results of a life of vice as contrasted to the rewards of a virtuous life. Sometimes these plays attacked a particular vice such as gluttony, blasphemy, et cetera. Very often they took the form of allegories which had become very popular since the thirteenth century.

"Bien-Avisé - Mal Avisé"

Among the group of Moralities which con-

trasted the life of the good man and that of the wicked one is a typical one entitled "Bien-Avisé et Mal-Avisé." At the beginning of the play these two characters start out together. They meet Free Thinker. Mal-Avisé falls asleep, but Bien-Avisé listens to the good advice of Libre-Arbitre, who conducts him to Reason, Faith, Contrition, Humility, Confession, Penitence, Fortune, et cetera, and finally to Good End. All this time Mal-Avisé has been following a wholly different road, meeting Folly, Poverty, Ill Luck, et cetera, finally coming to Bad End. After showing the horrible suffering Mal-Avisé undergoes in Hell, the author ends the play with an exhortation to the audience to profit by the good example of Bien-Avisé who now enjoys celestial bliss.

"L'Aveugle et le Boiteux"

Along with this Morality which is interesting but rather tiresome because of its length, we must mention another shorter one of a wholly different nature, the Morality of "L'Aveugle et le Boiteux," presented at Seurre in 1496. When the play opens St. Martin has just expired and the body is about to be carried to the church in a solemn procession. Two beggars are on the stage, one blind, and the other a cripple. They are lazy and are afraid the Saint's body will cure them if it passes by them, and then they will have to go to work. They try to flee, thus avoiding any contact with the funeral procession, but it is too late. The body of the Saint passes right by the two beggars

and they are cured instantly. The miraculous cure does not affect them in the same way. The blind man's attitude changes completely from one of indifference to one of wonder at the beauty of the world now that he can see it for the first time.

"Hélas le grand bien ne savais
Que c'était de voir clairement!
Bourgogne vois, France, Savoie,
Dont Dieu remercie humblement."

The cripple too decides to content himself in the future with feigning infirmity.

"Homme n'aura qui ne ne donne
Par pitié et compassion
Je ferai si bien la personne
Pleine de désolation."

In many of the Moralities the authors tried to teach the virtues of leading a good family life; they taught the audience how husbands ought to live with their wives; how mothers and fathers should bring up their children; how brothers and sisters should treat one another. Such was the plan of the following Moralities: "Les Enfants de Maintenant," "Les Frères de Maintenant," "L'Enfant Ingrat," "L'Enfant Prodigue," "L'Enfant de Perdition."

The Farce

A second form of Comedy in the fifteenth century is the Farce, the interpreters of which were not only the "Clercs de la Basoche," but also the "Enfants sans-Souci." This form flourished from about 1440 to the end of the sixteenth century. Throughout this period the theater served as the mouth-piece of the people. Through the theater the

people voiced their grievances or approbation. On the one hand it made violent attacks on the contemporary institutions under the cloak of jesting; on the other it gave praise to the ruling powers when they deserved it. "From this two-fold point of view these comedies are a true abstract of the History of France -- its internal, and sometimes its external politics."

"Les Enfants Sans-Souci"

"Les Enfants Sans-Souci," which has just been mentioned, was a company composed of the sons of good bourgeois families who were well-educated for that period. At the beginning of the fifteenth century they had obtained from the Confrérie de la Passion (who had the monopoly of theatrical representations in Paris) the right, not only of playing their pieces in the capital, but also of using the great Hall of the Hôpital de la Trinité. The conditions were: the division of profits between the two companies, obligatory residence for a part of the year of the "Enfants Sans Souci" in Paris, organization of the company into a regular "confrerie" with a leader called the Prince of Fools and other dignitaries, the adoption of a special costume with a cap adorned with asses' ears.

We can't always distinguish the plays of the "Enfants Sans Souci" from those of the Basochians, because the pieces of both companies are indiscriminately termed farces. Generally speaking, however, we may regard the "Sotie" as an intermediate type between the farce and the

Morality. It is a type preeminently dominated by satire; a kind of Comedy of Manners, recalling those of Aristophanes, sometimes attacking a particular trade or social type, sometimes society as a whole. The "Enfants Sans-Souci" acted their farces on trestles set up in the market place, or in front of the Halle de l'Hôpital, loaned to them by the Confrérie de la Passion, who in return for this favor obtained permission to act the Soties, plays, the exclusive rights of which belonged to their lessees.

The farce had no high moral, philosophical, political or religious ideas. Its sole object was to amuse by presenting a striking or ridiculous play. It made fun of faults and vices, but made no attempt to correct them. Most of the farces were, unfortunately, spoiled by the extreme licentiousness of the language. But this fault was not inherent in the type, because "Pathelin" which is the masterpiece of that type, fortunately escapes serious reproach of vulgarity. It seems as though everything about the farce de "Maitre Pathelin" is exceptional. whereas most of the farces have come down to us as manuscript, we have twenty-five editions of "Pathelin" before the seventeenth century. The story of the dishonest cloth merchant who was duped by a dishonest lawyer who was in turn duped by an ignorant shepherd is now known to all. It has enriched the language with its proverbs, allusions and speeches. The author is unknown, but the date has been fixed at 1470. Were it not for "Pathelin," the medieval farce

would be non-existent for us today.

One of the ideas of the Middle Ages was that the world was made up of fools. And so a society was organized to perform plays dealing with human folly. The society was made up of "sots" and the plays performed by them were "sotties."

The old "rêtes des fous" had nothing to do with the origin of Comedy, but the "sottie" is a direct descendant of the old "fêtes des ânes ou des fous." The repertory of the "sots" varied a great deal as to subject matter. Among the pieces presented were: "Les Gens Nouveaux," and "Du Monde et des Abus." But the master piece is "Le Jeu du Prince des Sots" by Gringoire.

As early as 1536 the Basochians and the Enfants Sans Souci had been forbidden to make allusion to any person whatsoever in their plays. In 1537 they were compelled to submit the manuscripts of the comedies to the censure of the Parliament.

Medieval comedy weakened year by year, after 1550, and disappeared entirely at the end of the sixteenth century. During the whole of this period three regular dramatic companies were giving performances; the Confrères de la Passion, the Basochians, and the Enfants Sans-Souci. Along with these societies there were also troops of wandering actors.

SUMMARY

Modern drama is about three thousand years old. It originated in Greece, growing out of the worship of Dionysus. The Roman theater was an imitation of the Greek, so they contributed nothing to civilization in the way of drama.

Later we have the minstrels who went about from place to place singing of deeds of bravery, of love, and of heroes. They served as a substitute for the theater in the years preceding medieval drama.

Christian drama began in the ninth century when the Catholic priests inserted a chant or song into the Mass in order to help the people understand the Mass. This song gradually developed into incidents called "Liturgical Drama." The oldest of these dramas are those of the "wise and Foolish Virgins" and of "The Prophets." These liturgical dramas were performed in the cathedrals which made beautiful and appropriate settings.

The first plays in the west were written in the tenth century by Hrosvitha, a nun of Saxony. These dramas were never performed. They were based on a pagan model, Terence, so they had no influence on religious drama.

The Feast of Fools, the Feast of Asses, and the Carols were desecrations of the cathedral theaters. These revels which flourished in France in the eleventh century were a Christian substitution for the Bacchanalia, and so were in the same spirit of licentiousness.

Along with Liturgical drama, another dramatic type of a religious nature developed from the twelfth century, the Mirack play. It concerned itself with the miraculous lives of the saints.

The Drama d'Adam, the most important work of the twelfth century is regarded as the oldest drama in the French language. The characters of Satan and Eve are very vividly portrayed and the play is not wholly lacking in literary merit.

The thirteenth century shows great progress in the theater. We have the "Saint Nicolas" of Jean Bodel, and "Théophile" by Rutebeuf, the only two miracles plays of that century which have come down to us.

Then we have the "Jeu d'Adam" ou de la Reuillée" and the "Jeu de Robin et Marion", both by Adam de la Halle. The former is the first specimen of comedy and the latter, the first comic opera written in French.

More compositions of the fourteenth century have come down to us than of the two preceding centuries. The forty-three plays of this century all belong to the same genre, that of "Les Miracles de Notre-Dame." Because of their crudity of language, attacks on the church etc. the Miracles were performed in the "Puys." The lives and legends of saints, the chansons de gestes, miraculous adventures were some of the popular subject for the "Miracles."

In the fifteenth century the goût for the theater became universal, and the theater became a part of the national custom, exerted a tremendous influence, and enjoyed

an unequaled popularity.

For a long time tradition attributed the origin of the theater to the Confrères de la Passion, authorized by letters patent of Charles VI in 1402.

It is in this century that the Spoken Mystery flourished. In Paris the Mystery Play was acted in a permanent theater by the Confrères de la Passion, but in the provinces the theater was installed in the market place, and the expense of the production was assumed by the municipality. Sometimes, however, an individual undertook the burden of the expense and the Mystery assumed an unheard of splendor.

From the literary point of view the Mysteries are not important, but historically they are of interest because of the light they throw on the customs and manners, ideas and sentiments, of the times.

Comedy, which had been entirely neglected in the fourteenth century made a new start alongside the Mystery play in the fifteenth century. The three types of Comedy were the Moralities, Farces, and Sotties. The Moralities were written for the purpose of teaching a Moral lesson, and were very often allegorical in form. The Farces, had no purpose except to amuse. Sometimes they succeeded in this, but very often their coarseness is revolting. The one shining light of this type is "Maître Pathelin." The Sotties are interesting historically when they treat of politics; otherwise with the exception

of "Le Jeu du Prince des Sots," they did not amount to much.

But the freedom of the theater did not survive Louis XII. Beginning with the reign of Francis I, watchful censorship suppressed the audacity of the "sots."

To sum up, all the repertory of the Middle Ages is more of a curiosity than a thing of beauty. But we cannot scorn it, for its importance is great and one cannot understand the history of the Middle Ages without studying its theater.

Now the theater is simply one of our amusements, but in medieval times it was their only amusement and a very important part of the lives of the people.

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